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"A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in baskets of silver."

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RIGHTEOUSNESS — WHERE FOUND.

BY WILLIAM COVERT.

IN His sermon on the mount, Christ told His hearers to seek "first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness." He stated that if they did this, other necessary things should be added, for His Father knew that they needed the temporal things of life. But the first thing to be sought was God's righteousness, because it is of the most importance. Matt. 6:31–33.

There is no way of obtaining this grace except by seeking for it. Our Redeemer says, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." Matt. 7:7. In order to find that for which we seek, we should learn where to look for the object, and how we may obtain it.

We learn that God's law teaches what the principles of righteousness require. Upon this point many scriptures could be cited, but we only have space for a few: "Thy testimonies that Thou hast commanded are righteous [margin, "righteousness"] and very faithful." Ps. 119:138. "My tongue shall speak of Thy word; for all Thy commandments are righteousness." Ps. 119:172. See also Isa. 51:7 and Rom. 2:26.

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Again, we are told that all that is contrary to righteousness—all unrighteousness—is sin (1 John 5:17); and sin is the transgression of the law (1 John 3:4; Rom. 7:7). This is the law of ten commandments, for the apostle Paul in the latter text quotes the tenth commandment to show what law was meant. Therefore, as the law of God condemns *all* sin and forbids *all* unrighteousness, it must embrace in itself all righteousness. The commandments of that law prohibit the culmination of sin, the greatest sin under the principle of each several precept, but the greatest sin includes all that made it what it is. God sees murder in hatred (1 John 3:15), and adultery in lust (Matt. 5:27, 28). The law is the reflect of God's character and government, hence includes within itself all righteousness.

Yet, while it is true that God's law expresses righteousness, it is also true that we cannot be made righteous by the law. A sinner, searching in the law for grace and strength, will find only condemnation for himself. Paul says: "We know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin." Rom. 3:19, 20.

It is the disposition of a man with an honest purpose, when he is made to know that he is wrong, to make an effort to place himself right. But he does not like to feel that he is a dependent creature. Therefore when he begins to see his sins, the first impulse of his nature is to grapple with

them in his own strength, before he will seek for righteousness in the way that it may be found. David was in a hopeful way when he said: "Innumerable evils have compassed me about; mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head; therefore my heart faileth me;" for when he came to this point in his experience, he could then pleadingly pray, "Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me; O Lord, make haste to help me." Ps. 40:12, 13. Such an earnest seeker is ready to be helped in the Lord's own way. The Lord "giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might He increaseth strength." The strength that is given is the Lord Himself, for "God is our refuge and strength;" He "is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." 1 Cor. 1:30. "This is His name whereby He shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS." Jer. 23:6.

HOW MAY IT BE OBTAINED?

But how shall we obtain this righteousness? Paul tells us we cannot get it by our works, for if we could, we would not give God the glory, but would boast of what we had done in saving ourselves from the power of sin and Satan. The apostle says: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast." Eph. 2:8, 9. To the Romans, in writing concerning Abraham, the apostle says: "If Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the Scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto

him for righteousness." Rom. 4 : 2, 3. This is a plain statement. None need be at a loss to understand it. Abraham's faith was counted to him for righteousness. The subject is continued, in verses 4 and 5, which state that "to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." The thought is that, if a man could do works of so much merit that he is entitled to salvation on that account, God would owe him eternal life; that God would simply be paying a debt in giving such a man salvation. There could be no grace counted on such terms. It would be salvation on legal principles; but if man has no righteousness of his own, and he is incapable of gaining it in his own strength, then we can see the greatness of God's love in bestowing it upon him.

"Righteousness is a gift from God." Rom. 5 : 17. "For if by one man's offense death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by One, Jesus Christ." But this gift is not bestowed where there is no faith to welcome it. "Without faith it is impossible to please Him; for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." Heb. 11 : 6. But faith is based upon the word of God. "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Rom. 10 : 17. As the individual reads God's word, or listens to someone expounding it, the Spirit of God enlightens his understanding. By this Spirit his sins are made to stick like arrows in his heart. Ps. 38 : 2.

But the same Spirit that will convict of sin will convince of righteousness. "And when He is come, He will reprove [margin, "convince"] the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." John 16 : 8. It is this Spirit that quickens the one who is dead in trespasses and sins. "It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh [fleshly mind] profiteth nothing; the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." John 6 : 63. By the Spirit's aid God's word is made quick and powerful. It is full of spirit and full of life. It is in this manner that the sinner is born again. "Not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away; but the word of the Lord endureth forever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you." 1 Peter 1 : 23–25. This is the beginning of a new life.

Previous to this experience the sinner's mind was controlled by the fleshly emotions of his carnal nature, and he was in the bondage of Satan. He was at enmity against God, not subject to the law of God, neither was it possible for him to be. Rom. 8 : 7. But in the new birth, so plainly set forth in the word of God, we see that through living faith he has become a child of God. "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." Gal. 3 : 26. This faith is a living principle, that changes the emotions of the heart, drives out sins, and places the love of God there. It is the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus. Rom. 8 : 2. This makes the penitent sinner free from the law of sin and of death that had previously ruled in his

members. Perhaps no language has ever been penned which states in a more complete manner that which is done for the sinner in conversion than the following: "For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." 2 Cor. 5: 21. Christ knew no sin, yet for our sakes He was made sin; on account of our sins He left heaven, that He might take upon Himself the iniquity of us all. The prophet says: "Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities." Isa. 53 : 4, 5.

Dear sinner, the sinless Son of God suffered thus to redeem you. Will you not gladly surrender your will to One who has done so much for you? He will take all your sins upon Himself, and, instead of those transgressions which seem like mountains weighing you down, He will place upon you His robe of spotless righteousness. Your sins He will cast into the midst of the sea (Micah 7 : 18, 19); and unto you He will impute His own righteousness. It was your sins that slew the Lord; it is His righteousness that will save you. Please to understand that you are not required to do good works in order to become righteous; but through faith in Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit the heart is to be changed, and it becomes the workmanship of God, created in Christ Jesus unto good works. Eph. 2 : 10.

It is the righteousness of Christ in the heart that will keep us in the path of obedience. Solomon says that "the righteousness of the perfect shall direct his way" (Prov. 11 : 5), and again, "Righteous-

ness keepeth him that is upright in the way" (Prov. 13:6). Thus we see that righteousness is not only imputed, but by faith it is also imparted, to the children of God. This is why Paul could say that if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature. 2 Cor. 5:17. It is literally true as far as the mind and the will of the one in Christ is concerned. Christ will through faith control the mind. If this is not done, our works will be sin. In order to be accepted, our works must be wrought in God. Jesus does not take the past of our character or life and cut out the soiled and filthy parts, and then fill up the rents and heal up the scars, and in this way patch up an old life in order to justify the penitent believer and make him righteous, but He renews it all. He takes the old all away, as something wholly offensive and utterly unfit to be repaired. The filthy rags of man's own righteousness are removed; Jesus washes him with His own blood in that fountain that has been opened to the house of David for sin and uncleanness. This places upon him that change of raiment that the king in the parable of our Saviour prepares for those guests who are invited to partake of the supper at the marriage of his son. Matt. 22:11–13.

The putting on of these garments is given in a beautiful picture by the prophet's pen: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels." Isa. 61:10. This is what John calls the righteousness of saints, in which all were arrayed whom in vision he beheld at the marriage

supper of the Lamb. Rev. 19 : 7, 8. Not one of all that vast multitude will wear a robe furnished by himself. This lesson is made to conform to the custom of the Eastern marriage. Each guest was prepared with apparel made for him by the bridegroom or his father. So at the marriage supper of Christ all guests will wear the furnished garments of salvation, made pure and white in His own blood. Dear reader, let me ask you if you are trusting in your own righteousness. If so, you will be speechless when the King comes in to see the guests. All things are ready, and the robe will be freely given you; everything has been done that infinite love can do. God's word, His Spirit, and the bride invite you. A bright home, eternal life, infinite joy, and the dear Saviour all are calling you. Will you come?

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